



The Longest Wait by **McDiggin'It**

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Romance

Language: English

Characters: J. Hopper, Joyce B.

Status: Completed

Published: 2018-01-12 02:12:37

Updated: 2018-01-12 02:12:37

Packaged: 2019-12-17 03:36:09

Rating: K+

Chapters: 1

Words: 2,951

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

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Title: The Longest Wait

Summary: Joyce thinks about all the memories and feelings she's shared with Jim, and comes to a realization. Set after S2.

A/N: I've always thought Joyce and Hopper would make a good couple, ever since their first scene together in season 1. Finally decided to write a fic on them. This is for the guest reviewer who requested a Joyce/Hopper fic. I hope you like it!

-McDiggin'It

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It has been a mere week since the Snow Ball. A week since she's seen Jim. He's been busy lately with work and taking care of Eleven— err, Jane. It's still so weird referring to Eleven as Jane. Eleven, no matter how weird it is for a name, seems more fitting for the powerful little girl with the warm smile, innocent eyes, short hair, and heart-wrenching nosebleeds.

Joyce sighs as she stares mindlessly at the shelves inside Melvad's General Store, where she has been working for nearly 10 years. Something Jim had said made her reflect back on her life.

"The past two years were crap because of the upside down. But I wouldn't wish things differently because it gave me a chance to be a father again, and also gave me an opportunity to find love where I'd always known it was."

At the time, she could only focus on the first part of what he'd said. She knows about his daughter and the horrible circumstances that took her away from him forever. She knows he must've felt that he needed to save Will last year when they found him lifeless in the Upside Down, because he wished more than anything that he could've saved his daughter. She knows that he's living with the pain of being without her everyday.

And because she knew those things, she hadn't said anything, or thought about the last half of what he'd said. And she has had a week to think about it.

"... to find love where I'd always known it was."

Joyce worries her bottom lip between her teeth as she absentmindedly draws patterns into the cover of the receipt book in front of her.

Could it be possible that he was talking about me?... no, that's absurd! We were never in a relationship before, so why would he... Joyce loses her train of thought as she's suddenly thinking back to her past.

She'd known Jim her whole life. He was always one of the very few people she really liked. She remembers when she first moved to Hawkin's Indiana with her parents. She was 6 years old then, and she'd met Jim at the playground at school. He was a year older in the second grade while she was in the first grade.

"Hi. I'm Jim." He'd introduced himself with a wide smile as she sat on the swing and stared at him. His head was a little big for his body and his hair was sticking up at odd angles, but he had the kindest eyes and the cutest nose and smile.

She'd smiled right back at him and introduced herself. "My name is Joyce."

"Cool! Both our names start with the letter J." He smirked and held his hand out to her. "We should be friends."

"But..." she trailed off and looked around the playground. All the other boys were staying far away from all the girls because they were afraid they might have cooties. "What if I have cooties?" She asked in a slight whisper.

Jim laughed at that. "Then I'll have cooties too." His smile grew even wider, and she thought it was the most beautiful smile ever.

She shook his hand, and from that moment on, Joyce decided that Jim Hopper was the coolest boy she'd ever known.

They were always good friends, but never anything more. He hung out with the older people in his class, and she hung out with her own friends.

It isn't until high school when she starts hanging out with and dating Hawkins High's resident bad boy, Lonnie Byers. Lonnie was a charmer, a sweet talker, and probably the biggest player in Indiana. But at the time, Joyce thought he was the one. She was young, naive, stupid even. Too consumed by his lies to realize that he only wanted one thing from her.

On Junior prom night, she got drunk and slept with Lonnie for the first time. The next day, she immediately regretted it. Their relationship fell apart before it even began, but by then, she'd found out she was pregnant.

Lonnie left her, and she was alone throughout her pregnancy. Jim, bless his soul, was the one guy in the whole school who still treated her the way he'd always did. With kindness and respect. She remembers one particular day when she went out with her friends when they insisted that being cooped up at home was not good for her and the baby.

They went to the movie theater to see The Night of the Living Dead. She was never a fan of horror films, but it was that or Candy, and if she had to watch that one more time, she was going to stab herself in the eyes.

Jim was there with his friends, and she found herself wedged between him and Karen, who insisted they sit with the boys. When the movie started, Joyce found herself digging her nails into her palms. She'd always hated the thought of zombies, and she was left wondering how she agreed to watch zombies eating people's brains over Candy Christians cleavage.

By the middle of the movie, she found herself shrinking more and more into her seat. She didn't want to let on that she was scared, but somehow, Jim knew because without so much as a glance towards her, he stuck his hand under the arm rest and silently took her shaking hand in his. Almost immediately, she relaxed and watched the entire movie without closing her eyes.

Jim only let go of her hand when the end credits were rolling and the lights turned back on. Joyce turned, smiling gratefully at him. "Thank you." She whispered, and he only smiled and winked at her.

Months later, Joyce was in labor, and her parents and her close friends

are the only ones there to welcome baby Jonathan into the world. Lonnie showed up too, holding a bouquet of slightly withering flowers, and the stupidest smile she'd ever seen in her entire life. She hated him.

She hated him even more when a couple entered behind him and introduced themselves as his parents.

While her parents talked to Lonnie's parents, Lonnie took the time to apologize to her for leaving her when she needed someone. She forgave him, but she was not going to take him back. That is, until her parents returned and dropped the biggest bombshell on her.

"We want you both to take care of the baby. Together."

Lonnie was happy, and she fought the urge to smack him across his stupid face with his flowers. She argued with her parents, but it was decided that for as long as she's staying under their roof, she was going to obey their rules and wishes. Her parents were not exactly a shoo-in for the world's greatest parents award, and Joyce reluctantly agreed to raise Jonathan with his idiot father.

For safety reasons, the doctor wanted to keep her just overnight to make sure nothing is wrong. Lonnie finally left to go home with his parents, promising to return the next day. Joyce found herself alone for the first time since she gave birth.

A knock on her door was heard, and a nurse came in, pushing a small bassinet with her beautiful little boy laying in it. Thank God he hardly looks a thing like his father! She's taught how to breastfeed, before the nurse leaves with a promise to return soon.

She winces and hisses as she's not used to the feeling of breastfeeding. It's quite painful, and she nearly cried out several times. Just as Jonathan began to doze off to sleep, another knock was heard, and to her pleasant surprise, Jim's head popped in.

"Hey." He smiled as he came in and closed the door behind him.

"Hey." Joyce smiled back exhaustedly.

Jim looked from her, to her baby, "He looks just like you." He smiled. He then looked at her and cleared his throat. "I errr— I came to say

congratulations and give you something."

"What?" She watched as he reached a hand into his back pocket and pulled out his wallet. He took out what looked like an index card and handed it to her. She looked down at the card and then laughed as she looked up at Jim with a grateful and loving smile. "Thank you, Jim. Really. I appreciate you and everything you do for me."

Jim shrugged and pointed at the card. "Use it."

Joyce smiled and looked down at the card again. "I will."

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She never used Jim's card. But she still has it. Joyce sighs softly as she takes her wallet out of the desk drawer. She unzips it, splaying it open in front of her, before digging her fingers into the side pocket, where she feels the smooth edge of the index card she'd put in there many many years ago.

She presses her middle and pointer fingers together on the index card, pulling it out slowly. A small, but genuinely happy smile graces her face as she unfolds the card. It looks like it's about to fall apart, but it doesn't. Her eyes roam over the card and she sighs to herself, wondering if it would be ridiculous of her to ask if she could still use the card.

After work, she drives Will and Jonathan over to the Wheeler's residence to hang out. She kisses Will's cheek and tells him to behave. She kisses Jonathan's cheek and tells him to be careful and use protection, to which he blushes and practically runs away from her and towards a waving Nancy.

Just as she's about to drive back home, Jim's truck pulls up next to hers. She looks through the window, seeing Eleven— Jane smile and wave at her before turning to hug her dad and run into the Wheeler's residence.

Jim rolls his passenger window down, and Joyce rolls hers down as well, looking at him expectantly.

"Can we talk?" Jim asks.

She nods and gets out of her car. She waits as he walks around his truck to her side and stops just in front of her. "Hey." She smiles.

He smiles back. "Hey. So errr, I was wondering if you'd— if you would like to have dinner with me tonight." He pauses and looks away quickly before glancing back. "I mean you don't have to, but I just— I thought I'd ask if you'd want to."

Joyce smiled so widely, she thought her face might permanently be stretched that way. "I'd love to, Jim."

"Oh." Jim laughs, then sighs in relief, then smiles widely at her. "That's... that's great."

They take Jim's truck and leave her car in front of the Wheeler's residence, talking quietly about everything and anything until they reach Don's Diner, where they end up ordering burgers, fries, and shakes.

Another memory comes to Joyce as they eat their dinner.

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"Pick a song."

They were in Don's Diner. Her parents were taking care of baby Jonathan for the night, Lonnie was at his own house, grounded for whatever stupid thing he'd done. And Joyce? Joyce decided that she needed to hang out with someone she actually likes hanging out with.

Joyce huffed and raised an eyebrow at Jim. "I don't know, you pick one."

"Fine." Jim shrugged and pressed a button on the jukebox. Joyce leaned over and peeked at his song choice before groaning out loud.

"Not that one!" She whined loudly.

Jim laughed at her and raised his hands in surrender. "I told you to pick one and you told me to pick one."

"Yeah, but that one is so overrated." She continued to whine, but it was no use. Jim was already pulling her hand and dragging her to the middle of

the diner.

"Dance with me."

"What?" She looked at him funny. "I— you can't even dance." She joked, even as her heart began to race.

Jim shrugged at her and grinned handsomely as he began swaying his hips in an exaggerated manner, singing the lyrics loudly. "Sugar, ahhh honey honey."

You are my candy giiiiirl. And you got me wanting youuuuuuu!"

Joyce couldn't help but laugh and sway along with him until they were actually dancing together like lovesick teenagers... not that they were in love or anything. They were just lost in the moment.

The moment Joyce realized that Jim Hopper, was still the coolest boy she knew.

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"Do you wanna dance?" Joyce suddenly asks, her cheeks reddening in embarrassment.

Jim stares at her, not sure if she is serious. He looks around the Diner, noticing it's lack of occupants. Aside from them, the only other person up front is the waitress who was in a corner booth, filing her finger nails. "I— I don't know— I mean, I can't even remember the last time I danced."

Joyce smirks at him. "Well I remember the last time I saw you dance."

Jim reddens as he laughs and covers his eyes in embarrassment. "God, that was such a long time ago."

Joyce grins and nods as she slides out of the booth and holds her hand out to him. "Come on." She wiggles her fingers at him, and she smiles triumphantly when he gives up with a sigh and takes her hand.

She pulls him over to the jukebox, pushing a few coins into the coin

slot, and then pushing a button.

Jim leans over her, looking at her song choice before laughing heartily. "Oh God, I thought this song has long since been removed from the list."

Joyce laughs as the song begins playing its first couple of notes. "Nope."

Sugar, ah honey honey

You are my candy girl

And you got me wanting you

They sway to the music, and Joyce feels emboldened by the way Jim is staring at her with a fond smile on his face. After all these years, she still thinks he has the most beautiful smile ever. Her children's smiles melt her heart, but Jim's smile... Jim's smile makes her heart beat faster than it has ever done before. She steps up in front of him, looking up at his handsome face.

He's so much taller than her. She'd always felt intimidated and inferior to tall people, but Jim never emitted that in her. Instead, he makes her feel safe and warm inside.

Their hands meet between them, and then he's slowly pulling her closer as they continue to sway to the music.

I just can't believe the loveliness of loving you

(I just can't believe it's true)

I just can't believe the one to love this feeling to

(I just can't believe it's true)

The Archie's croon on as Joyce stares up at Jim through her lashes. He's singing softly along to the song when she reaches into the pocket of her jeans and pulls something out.

"Jim?"

"Hmm?"

"I was wondering," Joyce pulls back slightly to push the old, withering card into his hand. "Is this still on the table?"

Jim's eyebrows furrow in confusion and curiosity as he unfolds the bent card. He blinks, then widens his eyes, then blinks again, before finally looking at Joyce with his mouth hanging open. "You still have this?"

Joyce nods with a smile. "Of course."

Jim looks like he's about to cry for a mere moment, but then the look is gone and replaced with something else. Joy? Pained joy? Joyce wasn't sure as she looks down at the card still splayed across his large palm.

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She smiles at it before looking up at him. "I understand if you don't want to try this." She says softly, and she means it. Jim has done a lot for her in the past, and not once did he ever ask for anything in return. She has realized a lot over the past year, and a lot more over the past week. And though she wants to explore a relationship with Jim, she's not going to push him. She smiles again. "It's all up to you —". The word is barely out of her mouth before she's squealing in surprise as Jim suddenly scoops her up into his arms and cuts her sentence off by pressing his lips against hers in a passionate embrace.

Their kiss lasts only a few blissful seconds, but it's without a doubt, the most magical kiss they've ever experienced. Joyce silently admits to herself that from the moment she met Jim Hopper at the playground at school, she had secretly been waiting for something like this. It took years for her to realize it, but it is finally happening.

They pull away, staring at each other with wide, love-filled eyes, and Joyce couldn't help but whisper to him, "That was the longest wait ever."

Jim chuckles and nods in agreement as he pulls her back to him and

kisses her again.

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A/N: Hope you Hopper/Joyce shippers enjoyed this. It's kind of out of whack, but I blame that on the fact that I'm writing 2 other fics as well and also trying to balance my life. Thank you for reading and please review!

-McDiggin'It